FIVE POINTS *of* A STAR MISSIONARY SOCIETY

Pearson Walker 1860-1930

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WOMAN'S BOARD OF HOME MISSIONS OF THE PRESBYTERIAN CHURCH IN THE U. S. A.

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FIVE POINTS OF A STAR MISSIONARY SOCIETY

By JESSIE W. RADCLIFFE

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Unity in Diversity

THE life of each church is distinct and individual. Shaping forces of environment, tradition, constituency, evolve varied results in a church organization as in an individual.

No two missionary societies, even with the same avowed aim and responsibility, are exactly alike. One society is a "praying society," blest with many members gifted and ready in prayer. Another's special development is in systematic study of mission fields and mission problems. The characteristic of another is in proportionate giving, while the large numbers and social life of one society are contrasted with the small numbers and "no-lunch" system of another. Each is, to some extent, a criterion or an epitome, even a necessity of the life of the church of which it is a part.

PRESBYTERIAN HISTORICAL SOCIETY
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The question of adaptability, of individual possibility for growth and wider usefulness, *under existing conditions*, is the problem for all. Better organization and methods will come to pass if those responsible will attend the meetings and study the plans of other auxiliaries.

A well conducted club meeting might open some eyes to the inadequate, flabby, slip-shod direction or indirection of their missionary meeting, even possibly enlighten them as to its lack of attraction for club women, or other women whose time is valuable, who will give money, but "don't ask me to come to your meetings." I have seen a small suburban or country society better conducted than some petrified city organizations, where often two or three women as unprogressive as good, hold back the wheels, so deep sunken in ruts that they can not see over the edge.

Officers and Members

The influence for power or for weakness of a leader is one thing, the *united* influence of the members of a society, for power, for weakness, for growth or for stagnation, is, as Rudyard Kipling says, "another story."

Individual women make up a society. A society will be good whose members are good members. Good members should demand and secure good officers.

It is a great thing for a society to have *good officers*. I do not believe in pledges

of any kind in these matters, but is not this form, used by a society in Philadelphia at its annual meeting, suggestive?

"With God's help I will magnify my office by bringing to it the best effort of which I am capable.

"Its duties shall be conscientiously performed in due time, never setting them aside for other things in which I may be much interested.

"In this office I am the servant of Christ, of my society, and of the cause of world-wide missions.

"May God give me grace to be faithful and efficient in the fulfilment of my duties."

To such officers the Executive Committee meeting will be as regular an engagement as the Auxiliary gathering. There the smallest detail will have its share of discussion. No loose ends will be left to jar the symmetry and effect of that approaching meeting.

Such officers will not consider themselves or permit themselves to be elected "for life." The development of "the other woman" will be her aim.

Officers so in earnest as that can do wonders and overcome mighty obstacles, but they cannot do it all. Each member of a society is responsible for co-operation and has no right to expect to be carried along "on flowery beds of ease," month after month, year after year. A *good member* is punctual, regular, conscientious in the use of her talents for

prayer, speech or song; is liberal according to her own, not her neighbor's means; her own, not her neighbor's conscience or lack of conscience. A good member is kindly in her judgments, careful in her expressed criticisms, has the welfare of her society on her heart between meetings and seeks to be practically helpful.

A society is a *good society* which, retaining its individuality, does not grow one sided, but seeks all possible symmetry. A missionary society which is spiritual in tone, ambitious in knowledge, increasing in gift, social in intercourse, growing in members and prompt in business, is a good society.

Most of these characteristics group themselves about the trite figure of the eye, the ear, the lip, the hand, the foot. There is no woman who, through one or more of these channels, has not her gift and opportunity. If she seeks it she will surely recognize it. Not all birds have the perfect song of the hermit thrush nor the gorgeous beauty of the cardinal, but it needs the cheering brightness of the friendly robin, the flashing gleam of the warbler's wing, the laugh of a gull and the merry chatter of a chickadee to fill God's feathered choir. Birds with no rapturous song to thrill the hearer's ear, no beauty of coloring to charm the eye, fill happily their appointed mission and make earth richer for their presence.

Emerson said of Thoreau, that he saw as with a microscope, heard as with an ear-trumpet, and his memory was a photographic register of all he saw and heard.

With what eyes do we see the things of the kingdom?

With what ears do we hear our Captain's orders?

Have we registered that help received in time of need, by passing it on?

Surely we all cry in contrition, that we are in truth, blind, deaf, ungrateful!

The Eye

By the eye, what can come through a missionary society? *Knowledge*, first of orders from headquarters, the Word of God. Next, knowledge of what has been done in obedience to orders; what our army of missionary men and women, at home and abroad—teachers, preachers, printers, hospital corps and doctors—are doing now, and what is to be the next step in the campaign? The woman who intelligently reads her Bible, her missionary monthlies and her church papers is ready with enthusiasm to do her part.

This eye can see who attends the meetings regularly, who are there occasionally, who never come. To appreciate the first class, stimulate the second and materialize the third is work for each and every member. It cannot, in a church the size of a village, be left to a

few officers or held to the responsibility of the indefinite "somebody else." "Anoint *thine own eyes* with eye salve that thou mayest see."

Through the eye comes the appeal of the map, the marvellous tale of the geographer. To-day, when the map of the world is changing fast, let the missionary eye be quick to see an open gate and an increased responsibility which is "the white man's burden."

This clear eye sees intuitively opportunities for co-operation, for gift, for growth; it sees God's workings in all things. It wears no blue glasses. It glories in rose-colored glasses colored with the tinge of sacrificial blood and clear as a beam from the sun of righteousness. Some eyes are "holden" that they see not. They look neither to the right nor left; they repel the advance of others, sometimes from sheer timidity, sometimes because a canker of prejudice and criticism has jaundiced the eye and obscured the vision. A keen eye sees much of human nature in a missionary society; much to its credit, something to its discredit, courtesies and forbearances happily, and alas! discourtesies, even rudeness, in strange quarters.

A breadth of vision, co-existent with charity of judgment, is sorely needed in church as in social life. It was Julia Ward Howe who, coming to the rigid and critical Boston from the very differ-

ent atmosphere of Kentucky, exclaimed one day as she saw the sign, "Charitable Eye and Ear Institution," "Why, I didn't know that there was a charitable eye or ear in Boston." Fishes in Mammoth Cave have, as a result of continual disuse, no eyesight. The same law applies to those who *will* not see the "personal equation," it one day comes to pass that they cannot, even where they would. If in physical life, how much more in the spiritual life is the vision of faith weakened and distorted by disuse. "Having eyes, they see not."

The Ear

"Hearing, they hear not; neither do they understand."

Dull ears and sharp ears are ours; dulled and sharpened by forces of will, prejudice and preoccupation; quick to hear gossip and criticism, dull to the treasurer's request for promptness; quick to hear discouraging rumors or comments, dull to grasp the bright, cheering thought. Ears that eagerly drink in details of social function, of cruel disaster or shame, find nothing piquant in reports and plans for missionary work.

Keen enough for the discords of the present, they are dull to the harmony of "that divine event to which far-off creation moves." An Irishman would surely tell us, "Keep your eyes on your ears." A good listener is an inspiration to a

leader or speaker and in composite, may make or mar any gathering. There are things to hear and things not to hear in a missionary society. Ears must be deaf to much that only chills and disheartens, while eagerly listening for a message from Him who maketh the deaf to hear and the dumb to speak. The ear that hungrily seeks for such message through Scripture, prayer, song, business and word is sure to find one. "Lord, speak, for thy servant heareth."

The Lip

We think more of what other people's lips bring to our ears than what our lips give to others' ears. Strange revelations we make of ourselves unwittingly by what we repeat, by what we interpret of and for others. Blessed be those women's lips which teach "infant lips to pray," and blessed be those who can voice the petitions and hopes of silent sister women, who raise to the very gates of heaven on the wings of prayer, sorrowful and pleading women's hearts, laden, not only with their own, but with the want and need of the whole world lost in the darkness of sin. The proper use of the voice, in prayer, in song, in business matters, in all the exercises of women's meetings, is an immense factor for help or for hindrance, and more a matter for cultivation than is commonly recognized. Only exceptional faith or

patience can be edified by an inaudible prayer or reading.

What of the exceptional member who cannot or will not stop either talking or praying? She spoils many a meeting and closes many another mouth "filled with messages."

"Long-windedness, now pray take heed,
The best of discourse smothers:
So when you talk, or pray, or read,
Remember 'there are others'!"

A cheerful voice is not necessarily flippant, and there are times when a laugh in a missionary meeting may clear the atmosphere and tend to genuine piety. The deaf woman who could only "smile them in and smile them out" might preach to many a good woman who gives the impression, at least, of "sulking in and sulking out." "Company manners," if that means the best manners, are surely nowhere more appropriate than in God's house and in His work.

While sociability is not the end and aim of a missionary society, a certain healthy, natural "camaraderie" (comradeship) can hardly fail to spring from work for a common and sacred purpose. Sudden intimacy, built on mere acquaintance, with no bottom ground of friendship, is as absurd and unnatural in church life as on a hotel piazza. But there is a legitimate expectation of acquaintance through a society, and the trained and kindly eye and ear and lips

have all their functions in its promotion. There is even a desirable "golden gossip," as Mrs. Whitney calls it, quite distinct from the morbid interchange of variations on the three D's—dresses, diseases and domestics."

But actions speak louder than words. "He prayeth best who loveth best," and who loveth best is ready for sacrifice, even of physical comfort, or of personal luxury. To see, to hear, to speak, is well, then comes action and the hand and the foot must play their proper parts.

The Hand

The hand and all it stands for is a thermometer of the temperature of life. It may be cordial in greeting, or unsympathetic as ice, ready in gift, or close-fisted as Scrooge before his Christmas vision; consecrated in pen, in brush, in needle, or withholding its talents in real miser fashion. If the eye has seen a vision of duty, if the listening ear has heard a divine command, the hand must and will obey in whatever fashion it may. The woman who handles properly and carefully the business of a society, who by her pen keeps in touch with Presbyterial and Synodical work, who illuminates her office, whatever it be, is a blessing to any society.

We owe a debt of gratitude to our treasurers and secretaries, which it too seldom expressed; the treasurers especially, in their variegated experiences.

with all shades of sensitiveness and of forgetfulness, should have our heartiest sympathy and thanks. "The work of my hands with the love of my heart" is a perfect combination, a motto to be spiritualized by every Christian woman who craves usefulness. To make a room comfortable is a talent unused in the hands of many a woman, and a good doorkeeper in the house of the Lord has a vocation. The hand that as carefully puts on the calendar the date and hour of the missionary meeting as that of the tea, or lunch, or whist club, is not likely to forget the offering or pledge. Her giving as well as her coming will be systematic and thoughtful.

And the hand that cuts and shuffles so deftly for hours at a time, should not weary with holding a hymn-book a few moments after twelve, nor think it childish to use monthly envelope offerings. "The work of our hands, establish Thou it."

The Foot

Then the feet of Christian women, what is their special function from a missionary point of view? Promptness is one duty. You remember the little rhyme:

"My feet, they are so good to me,
They take me up the stair;
I only have to push them
And they take me everywhere."

Willing servants they are, and what a good thing it is we pushed them a little earlier and a little more vigorously some days. There are those who must, from varied pressure at home, be late to meetings; there are more who, from genuine thoughtlessness, come five, ten, fifteen minutes late, invariably a source of distraction and detriment to the worship of the opening exercises. If these feet have gotten us there in good time, why not let them take us up the aisle, and leave the back seat for those necessarily detained, or attending to duty as ushers. There are few people more trying to a leader than the "back-seat contingent." Their ears are strained, their eyes distracted, their lips too often silent, and they labor under an almost irresistible temptation to slip out. To harmonize one's self to a meeting is a duty too seldom recognized.

There are feet, alas, quite palsied when it comes to missionary meetings, church attendance and church visiting, which seem apparently electrified for shopping, for sight-seeing, for climbing the social ladder or keeping step on its slippery rounds. Shall we not all obey Solomon's injunction, "Ponder the way of thy feet"; nor forget what he says of a "naughty person," that "he speaketh with his feet." Let us remember the feet of them that bear good tidings, far away in our own land, and across the seas, our substitutes, in all the wearied-

ness, the hurriedness, the roughness of their way. Above all, let us remember those nail-pierced feet on the cross, and bow our heads in shame of the small measure of our boasted sacrifice.

Lives, reconsecrated in their entirety, should we bring to the service of Him whose weary feet trod the Syrian hills, whose eyes, as His lips, spake encouragement and cheer, whose ears were never deaf to the needy, and whose hands brought the healing touch of the Great Physician. Then there would be no need to discuss the points of a good missionary society, for the church itself, Christendom itself, would be a good missionary society.

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